1: Blackwood E-5 (1929-1930) 1935
ON6 Buka ON6
Kurtatchi

INTRODUCTION

THE people whose lives are described in this book are the Melanesian inhabitants of the island of Buka and of the north coast of the island of Bougainville, separated by the narrow strip of turbulent water known as Buka Passage. These two, the most north-westerly of the Solomon Islands, have since 1920 formed part of the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The locality was chosen as likely to afford me an opportunity of studying native life under relatively primitive conditions.

On September 28, 1929, I began work at Petats, a coral islet off the west coast of Buka, which had been recommended as a suitable starting-point for my inquiry. I soon realized, however, that the people of Buka as a whole, and of Petats in particular, had already come under the influence of the white man to such an extent that much of their original mode of life had disappeared. As they themselves put it, speaking in pidgin-English: 'White man he capsize altogether something belong before.' It is true that the investigation of an erstwhile savage society is a most important part of present-day anthropology, but I had been instructed to study a primitive community. A journey round Buka proved that little was to be gained by moving to any of the villages there. Meanwhile, I had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Hadden, the daughter of the anthropologist R. Parkinson, author of *Dreissig Jahre in der Südsee*. At her suggestion I accepted an invitation from Piñari, the local headman, to come and stay at Kurtatchi, a village on the north coast of Bougainville, about ten miles east of Buka Passage. After a preliminary visit, I settled there on January 1, 1930. Owing partly to its being less easily accessible, and partly to the conservatism of its people, I found at Kurtatchi conditions approximating somewhat more closely to what they had been before the coming of the white man, though, as will be evident from my report, far from being unchanged. The bulk of my information was obtained at this village, which was my home for nine months; the villages of Tabut and Ruri, on either side of it, providing valuable additional and corroborative data.

The following somewhat personal notes on the manner in which I lived and worked are given in order to make quite clear the

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circumstances under which the material in this report was collected.

On arriving at Petats I started immediately to work on the language, and was making good headway when I decided to move to Kurtatchi. Here I had to begin afresh upon a new dialect. The vocabulary differs considerably from that of Petats, but as the syntax is similar, my previous work was not altogether wasted. Beginning by making use of pidgin-English, with which all the younger men (but not the women nor the older people of either sex) were familiar, I gradually substituted the native dialect for conversational and working purposes, and eventually was able to use it with some degree of freedom in the give and take of everyday life, and for writing down what my informants told me. For this purpose I used a simplified form of the International Phonetic System. When taking down stories, and anything else that required to be recorded verbatim, I had little difficulty in getting the narrators to speak at a pace which I was able to follow with my pen.

None of these people had any acquaintance with standard English, pidgin-English being the universal medium of converse between them and the whites. As interpreters, I chose carefully the men who possessed the best knowledge of pidgin-English. One man, Matarē (whose photograph appears in Pl. 11), in particular was very useful to me, being interested, careful, and more articulate than the others. With him, and some others, I went over the greater part of my material (omitting, of course, information given to me in confidence), interlining my note-books with a pidgin-English translation, in the course of which I was able to get unfamiliar words explained to me, thus often opening up some new line of inquiry. Unfortunately for me, the local dialects differ almost from village to village, so I was obliged to fall back on pidgin-English as a lingua franca whenever I worked outside a limited area. In such cases I had to content myself with taking down in dialect the key words only.

At Petats I lived in the rest-house which is maintained for the use of Government officials. At Kurtatchi I had a house built specially for me. I was given a site in the new part of the village, facing two lines of huts. There the villagers, working under my direction, constructed a house and outbuildings which proved admirably suited to my needs, with a good verandah, from which I could watch what was going on in the village while I wrote up

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my notes. The photograph which forms the frontispiece to this volume was taken from it; the heads of the zinnias in my garden can be seen at the foot of the picture. The villagers were encouraged to make use of certain portions of this verandah. Men, women, and children freely availed themselves of this permission, enjoying the shade as they sat and worked, making string or nets, minding babies, playing at cat's-cradles, or chatting while they smoked or chewed betel. From such casual and unstudied contact I learned a great deal. Many evenings were spent in telling stories, when tellers and listeners would crowd round my big lamp, which gave them great pleasure.

I secured as my servant a young man named Ross, a native of Petats, who had worked for white people and knew what was required of him. He came with me to Kurtatchi, and soon made himself at home there, although at first he could not understand the local dialect. He served me faithfully and well. I could always leave my establishment safely in his charge, even for several days at a time, and count upon returning, after some strenuous expedition, to a clean house and a good meal. He was bitterly disappointed that he could not come home with me.

To enlist the interested co-operation of the natives, it was sufficient to tell them that my people, who lived very far away, had sent me to see what kind of folk they were, what they did, and what sort of things they could make, saying that this was my work, just as their work was fishing and gardening, and that my *tsunaun* (Chief) would be pleased if I could tell him all about them when I went home. This personal note particularly appealed to them, and they would sometimes say, in explaining something I had not properly understood: 'We do not want you to tell your *tsunaun* anything about us that is not true.' Note-book, typewriter, and camera were accepted without question as aids to my work, the two latter arousing great interest.

After I had been resident among them for a little while, they began to come and tell me when anything special was going to take place, in case I wished to be present. When a feast was held I was always invited, and they were delighted when, under the sponsorship of the women, I took part in their dances. During my morning stroll round the village I was sure to be asked to join in some one or other of the day's activities, an invitation which I frequently accepted, gaining thereby a practical acquaintance with their

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[1] Our knowledge of the Solomon Islanders is rather sparse even today. Up to the present the most valuable contributions have been made by H. B. Guppy, The Salomon Islands and their Natives (1887) and C. M. Woodford, A Naturalist Among the Head-hunters (1890); but even these two did not have the opportunity to become acquainted with the extreme northwestern islands of Buka and Bougainville. On its voyage the "Gazelle" touched the west coast of Bougainville on the twenty-fifth of August 1875; since that time merchants have frequently visited the island, in part to make purchases and in part to recruit workers for plantations in other areas. On these occasions bloody conflicts frequently arose between the natives and the whites so that the former have gained the reputation of being a warlike and cruel people. I believe, however, that this reputation is unmerited. It cannot be denied that quite a few white men in Bougainville have been slain by the natives; but frequently we must acknowledge that the death of a great many of them was caused by their own misdeeds. The recruiting of plantation workers with its many evil consequences has nevertheless had one advantage. A large number of the natives have seen other regions, become acquainted with other circumstances, and come to comprehend the character of the white man better. Thereby, in the course of the years, a transformation has taken place in their mutual relationships; even if one party cannot meet the other with absolute confidence, still a certain armed neutrality has been brought about by means of which a rather calm and peaceful relationship is gradually being built up.

The following statements on the ethnography of the northwestern Solomon Islands (Buka, Bougainville, the islands of the Bougainville Strait) including Carteret and Nissan Islands (1) are the result of

1. Both of these island groups must be considered as belonging ethnographically to Buka, Bougainville, and the islands of the Bougainville Strait. The Carteret Islands were populated by natives from Buka about

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FOLK STORIES FROM THE NORTHERN SOLOMONS.

[*Read at a Meeting, 20th January*, 1932.]

● 114 THE stories which form the subject of the present paper were collected between September 1929 and October 1930, while I was living among the natives of Buka and Bougainville, the two most northerly of the Solomon Islands.[1] The first three months were spent on the small island of Petats, off the west coast of Buka; the remaining nine on the north coast of Bougainville, mainly at a village called Kurtatchi, with excursions into the surrounding country as opportunity offered. In consequence of the work of the Methodist [117] Mission, the people of Petats have come to a considerable extent under White influence, but the village of Kurtatchi is still comparatively little affected by contact with the White Man. The examples here given are selected out of a large number, obtained chiefly in these two villages, but as I also took every opportunity of recording stories heard in the course of visits paid to other localities in company with my native friends, my collection is probably fairly representative of the tales told throughout Buka and the northern portion of Bougainville.

126 As a guarantee of good faith, I will first give some account of the circumstances under which the stories were obtained. After my evening meal, I used to hang up my hurricane lantern on that side of my verandah which served as my study. Very soon a little group of natives would gather

[122] [1] My work in the Solomon Islands was undertaken as part of a programme of field studies initiated by the Institute of Human Relations, University of Yale. My most grateful thanks are due to the Institute for the generous financial support accorded me. The University of Oxford granted me leave of absence from my Demonstratorship in order that I might take advantage of this opportunity.

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539 773 171 is called Semsem, and is described as a " devil " who devoured all the people of Tanna except one old woman. Her twin sons, who afterwards destroyed Semsem, were conceived of a stone which she ate.

539 773 171 ●114 *Note.*—The references here given are confined to works which contain a recognisable variant of the " Two Brothers " story as told on the island of Buka. The wider issue of the " cult of the Brethren " throughout Oceania is dealt with in detail by Dr. Haddon in the forthcoming final volume of his Report on the Torres Straits Expedition. I am much indebted to Dr. Haddon for permitting me to become acquainted with his discussion of the subject in MS., and also for his kindness in reading the MS. of the present paper. In connection with the story as here given he makes the following comment (in a letter from which I quote with his permission) : " The relation between the " two brothers " and the Oceanic Brethren (Qat-Tangaloa, etc.) is obscure, though doubtless there is some connection. It seems evident that some syncretism has taken place. We have to take into account the original Papuan stratum in Melanesia and various successive waves of culture from Indonesia, of which the betel users were probably one of the last spreads. I do not see how we can with our present knowledge differentiate between the tales and cults of these various layers."

Class II. Culture Origin Stories.

538 773 Under this heading I have included stories purporting to explain certain practices or customs of the people. Usually, though not always, the originators of these are nameless, differing in this respect from the culture heroes of Class I. Among my collection are stories illustrating the origin of fire, of canoe-making, of eating pig, of various musical instruments, and many others. The following will serve to illustrate this category.

How People Learnt to Eat Human Flesh.

539 773 Tchinaleke sent away her son-in-law and his wife, she said : " You go and work in the taro garden, I will look after

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TREATMENT OF THE SICK IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS[1]

114 121 DURING a residence of twelve months among the Melanesians of the north-western Solomon Islands, I had frequent opportunities of watching the natives treat one another for various forms of illness, and of collecting specimens of the plants and other substances which constitute their materia medica. The purpose of this paper is to place on record information given me by the natives themselves. No attempt will be made to deal with the subject from the standpoint of the medical practitioner, a task for which I am not qualified.

114 126 My information was obtained chiefly from the villages of Kurtatchi and Tabut, on the north coast of Bougainville. It was recorded verbatim in the local dialect, and a sample of each plant was collected at the same time. Unfortunately the incompleteness or imperfect preservation of many specimens rendered their identification impossible. Many of the prescriptions were given by more than one individual independently, or the technique might be the same while the plants differed. For some of the commoner ailments, people seemed to have their own favourite remedies, as do country folk in England. Some of these are secret and were imparted to me in private, others appear to be widely known.

754 757 It is sometimes said that primitive people regard every kind of sickness as the result of black magic. No one could be more conscious, or more terrified, of the power of black magic, which he calls "bad medicine" or "poison," than is the Solomon Islander, and he is not slow to ascribe his misfortunes to the machinations of some ill-disposed person who has "made poison"

[22] [1] This paper is based on data collected between Sept. 1929 and Oct. 1930 on the islands of Buka and Bougainville, the most north-westerly of the Solomon group. I am indebted to the committee for research on problems of sex, National Research Council, Washington, D.C., for the opportunity of studying these primitive people, to the experts at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for the identification of my botanical specimens, and to Prof. C. G. Seligman for useful comments.